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ABSTRACT

The Commission on Graduate Education of the National Association of State Universities and Land Grant Colleges has assembled in this booklet the nature of the fundamental problems of graduate education accompanied by recommendations for action. Nine areas of concern include redesigning graduate education for the twentieth century, distinguishing different purposes in graduate education, utilizing further resources in graduate education, identifying the graduate student and securing his status, supporting graduate education as a national effort, understanding what graduate education can and cannot do, selecting individuals for purposeful programs, recognizing special needs of ethnic minority students, and redirecting graduate programs to meet the needs. (AJ/JM)

The National
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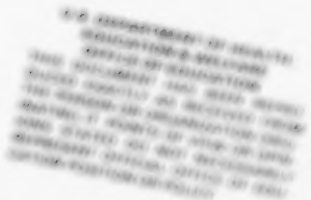
Problems In Graduate Education . . .



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This report was prepared by Dr. W. Gordon Whaley, Dean of the Graduate School at the University of Texas at Austin and chairman of the Commission on Graduate Education of the National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges, with the assistance of members of the Commission. It was submitted to the Senate of the Association for its information and guidance.

August 1972

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INTRODUCTION

For several years there has been a growing concern about the state of graduate education in the United States. The National Science Board addressed itself to this problem in a major report on obligations for financing this portion of the national educational effort. The National Research Council addressed itself in a serious dialogue to an evaluation of the successes and failures of the effort. The Association of Graduate Schools in the Association of American Universities has called attention pointedly to the need for change, and the Council of Graduate Schools in the United States addressed an entire meeting to the desirability of some changes.

Much student unrest and much taxpayer disenchantment have been related to some ill-defined concerns about deficiencies in graduate education. The Commission on Graduate Education of the National Association of State Universities and Land Grant Colleges, cognizant of all these questions and apprehensions has made an attempt to set forth herewith in understandable terms the nature of the fundamental problems accompanied by some recommendations for action considered to be urgently required if the situation is not to degenerate further and there is not to be a serious interruption in the nation's continued accumulation of knowledge, its application to the benefit of the people, and its transmission to assure an increasingly enlightened population.

1

REDESIGNING GRADUATE EDUCATION FOR THE LATE TWENTIETH CENTURY

Until the latter part of the nineteenth century most educational needs were met by baccalaureate programs. Then, concern about the quality of training in professional areas such as those in medicine and the law led to the association of collegiate education with professional training. Requirements for additional knowledge in many subjects also suggested extension of educational activities beyond the baccalaureate level. The conspicuous success of European institutions in the advancement of learning and the production of scholars resulted in the importation of the European Doctor of Philosophy into American universities where it has continued to serve an increasing number of purposes, often with little modification of the original model.

Today we are faced with a multitude of new problems, new fields of endeavor, and new responsibilities in graduate education. For some of these, the traditional Ph.D. program serves very well. For others, it has only limited relevance. Reexamination of the whole graduate program structure is urgently needed in order to modify and strengthen Ph.D. programs that are proven to be successful and to design new sorts of programs to take care of needs that are not being adequately met. The same sort of procedure is also called for at the level of Master's degrees.

RECOMMENDATION: *A national group involving graduate program administrators, other responsible university officials, faculty members, students, and users of the products of graduate education apart from the university should be established to arrange a review of the needs for advanced education and to indicate the various options for meeting them. This group should attempt to assess both the needs of the moment and those of the future that are reasonably*

profitable, propose the options available for meeting these needs, and arrive at some reasonable evaluation of resources necessary to adopt each of the options. There should be a general overall national assessment to suggest the relevance of existing programs, elimination of unnecessary ones, and encourage the undertaking of new fields of endeavor.

Graduate degree-awarding institutions should then individually review their own status and achievements and potential in relation to this national group's review and determine which courses might be most profitable for them to follow. One hoped for result would be a reduction in the expansion of Ph.D. programs and the substitution of a number of alternatives for advanced education for purposes not being satisfactorily met by Ph.D. programs.

2

DISTINGUISHING DIFFERENT PURPOSES IN GRADUATE EDUCATION

American graduate education is attempting to serve a multiplicity of purposes through only two basic program designs: (a) education of individuals in the ongoing pursuit of knowledge in an ever-increasing number of areas and (b) production of teachers to staff institutions of higher learning. These activities are, in some instances, intimately interrelated as when an individual who will become a member of an institution with a heavy commitment to the search for knowledge becomes highly trained in the methodologies usable in research and at best becomes a successful participant in the search.

The individual who is to become a teacher in an institution dedicated to providing oncoming generations with the knowledge and skills required to live rewarding lives in basically nonresearch-oriented activity may not only not need this training, his life potential may be diminished by the fact that the time devoted to it has been lost to the pursuit of something else. Exclusive dedication to research-oriented programs is clearly not enough. The unresponsiveness of graduate schools in developing alternate routes condemns many individuals to second-rate status in the areas in which graduate education has been notably successful. In other areas they might make major satisfying contributions.

Concern with these two program designs has led graduate education to ignore to a large extent the fact that many of its products go into quite different sorts of careers—government, various types of positions in industry and management, social work, a number of undertakings related to the health professions or other types of work done by practitioners rather than researchers.

[illegible]: Each graduate-degree awarding institution should study the relations between the character of its degree programs and the probable life careers of the individuals who will pursue these degrees. A set of alternative types of programs should be developed by each graduate school and information about them made available to incoming students so that they may choose those programs most in their interest at the outset. Up-to-date information on options available might avoid much blind choice and subsequent frustration.

3

UTILIZING FURTHER RESOURCES IN GRADUATE EDUCATION

In the course of their activities graduate schools have collected or become associated with many of the most significant library collections in the country, many of the most extensive research facilities, and they have encompassed in their faculties and staffs a large proportion of the most advanced intellectual resources in the nation. They are thus in a position to provide education for many purposes other than careers in research or teaching and could become centers around which programs of reeducation could be developed. By taking advantage of their resources in many different ways, the graduate schools could greatly increase their effectiveness in serving the people.

RECOMMENDATION: *Especially in areas of rapid technological advance and in a wide assortment of public affairs areas graduate schools should assume a largely heretofore unrecognized obligation—that of providing for the reeducation and retraining of individuals in seminars, workshops, and conferences. In most institutions the extension services are not developed to fulfill this requirement on an advanced level and are oftentimes overwhelmed by the magnitude of providing continuing education at the undergraduate level.*

Graduate schools should explore what they can do, possibly in some strengthened relationship to extension and adult education work, to order to provide the missing part of continuing education at the advanced level. In many instances at least some part of certification procedures or other recognition will be required.

4

IDENTIFYING THE GRADUATE STUDENT AND SECURING HIS STATUS

Because graduate programs were not clearly dissociated from undergraduate programs when they became part of American universities, because they have rarely been provided with an adequate budgetary base, and because graduate students have often been used too extensively in the teaching of undergraduate students, and because the graduate student population is generally randomly intermixed with the undergraduate population, the university has failed to recognize the status of the graduate student.

The graduate student has completed a college career; he is more mature, and being embarked on what should be a more focused learning experience, he deserves a status of his own. He should not be looked upon as a student in the undergraduate sense. If he is teaching, he deserves forthright recognition of his work rather than being dismissed as "just as T.A." If he is doing research, he deserves equivalent recognition as a junior partner in a professional effort. If he is aimed toward a university career he deserves status as a younger colleague of the faculty members. In any or all of these he deserves time and attention from the faculty and administration and a respected right to participation in the dialogue that is in reality the heart of the university.

Inasmuch as education is a continuum and graduate students frequently have much to offer undergraduate students, the best arrangement is probably one in which associations between graduate and undergraduates are easily possible. It is a mistake, however, to handle graduate students in the same patterns of teaching and learning as most institutions use to take care of undergraduates.

RECOMMENDATION: Some portion of the space planning in every graduate school should enhance

contacts among graduate students and afford them some opportunities for learning apart from the much larger population undergraduate students. Most notably the graduate students should be kept in intimate contact with faculty members. Neglect on the part of faculty members in providing guidance and counsel is one of the major complaints of graduate students at the present time, and this part of the faculty members' effort should be encouraged and rewarded so that it may grow in proportion to the needs of the graduate students. The responsibility for enhancing the learning experiences of graduate students should be recognized as a time-consuming, highly individualized part of the faculty members' efforts and interpreted in some direct manner as equivalent to other faculty responsibilities. Advanced graduate students deserve assistance in introduction into the careers they have chosen.

For more than a decade there has been a counter complaint that undergraduate education has been seriously damaged by senior faculty members devoting essentially all their attention to graduate students, and much of the tension between graduate schools and undergraduate colleges has been related to this proposition. What really needs to be recognized is that some faculty members can work effectively with both groups of students, while others are more effective with one group than the other. There is thus a need for great institutional flexibility to allow both needs to be met.

5

SUPPORTING GRADUATE EDUCATION AS A NATIONAL EFFORT

In terms of demands put upon it, failure of understanding of its multitude of purposes, changes in priorities in allocation of natural resources, and for many other reasons, American higher education is facing a fiscal crisis. From this crisis the graduate program may well suffer significantly by virtue of its history. The cost of graduate education has been centrally borne in most institutions by the budgets of undergraduate colleges supplemented by small internal and larger external grants specifically related to research or particular aspects of program development.

At this time there is little knowledge of the actual cost of graduate education. The GRADCOST study, being conducted by the Council of Graduate Schools and the National Association of College and University Business Officers and supported in part by the National Science Foundation, is aimed at determining what it actually is. There is wide acceptance of the fact that graduate education is one of our most valuable national resources. It is clearly indicated, as suggested in the National Science Board's report on graduate education to the President, that plans be made immediately for the assumption of a large part of this cost by the Federal government. Functionally graduate education is already a highly nationalized undertaking.

There is another reason why attention to this matter is urgent: the success of the National Institutes of Health, National Science Foundation, Atomic Energy Commission, National Defense Education Act, and the National Aeronautics and Space Administration in bringing about redirection of programs and bringing about changes in the national interest has brought about needed modifications in a relatively few years, and it is a certainty that exclusively local

consideration and action would have taken much longer if it indeed had been effective at all.

RECOMMENDATION: Partly because the unique status of higher education as a national asset is not broadly enough understood, partly because the patterns of support for higher education developed in the late 1950's had conflicting goals and partly because the diversity of educational needs involved and means of meeting it were not recognized, much funding has now been withdrawn. The whole problem of priorities for different sorts of educational support and patterns by which this can be done needs redefinition. In specific reference to graduate education the Federal government in conjunction with graduate schools should organize a reconsideration of the Federal support of graduate education, in part by noncategorical institutional grants, by the existing mechanisms of fellowships awarded to institutions and various types of research grants, but also in terms of an extended system of educational awards to individual students of high promise who should be free to select the institution of their choice. In this reconsideration attention should be given to diversifying the learning experience of graduate students and to the balance between experience and teaching, experience and research, and free time to be devoted to completing programs. Being long-term processes, certain portions of the educational effort require long-range funding.

6

UNDERSTANDING WHAT GRADUATE EDUCATION CAN AND CANNOT DO

Graduate education has suffered notably from exaggerated or irrelevant expectations. The success of graduate education and its research-centered activities in contributing over a long period to the growth of knowledge and to technological advance has attracted many individuals whose interest and talents lie mainly in other areas into this segment of higher education. Notably the focus of its central activities between the early 1950's and the 1960's led to an expectation that it would provide a vehicle for the early resolution of many problems to which its structure and orientation are not, in fact, relevant.

The result is a difficult situation to analyze, for some changes in graduate education could greatly increase its relevancy and the dropping of some aspects of its time-consuming methods would enhance its responsiveness greatly. The fact remains that even with such changes, graduate education would provide no universal answers to some of our more significant problems. To contend that it would do so will only further compromise its progress in those components where it is notably successful and further disillusion many hopeful individuals. All graduate education can do is to make available bodies of knowledge and provide training in skills, in the accumulation of knowledge and in methodologies appropriate to the resolution of the problems. Ideally it performs these functions in an environment conducive to intellectual growth, and it provides for periodic evaluations of this intellectual growth and competence.

The complaints of many graduate students that it does not impart values or provide immediate resolutions of matters wholly outside its purview suggests that they fail to distinguish between what can be taught and what must be learned and between individual concepts and long-range social action.

RECOMMENDATION: After reviewing programs in terms of purpose, appropriateness, and available support, each institution should have periodically revised statements of the design and intended purposes of each program it offers. These statements should emphasize the sorts of professional opportunities to which program in given types of programs might lead, but should also convey the general spectrum of learning opportunities to the students, making it clear that the extent to which a student becomes more than merely competent in a profession but truly educated is dependent primarily upon him.

7

SELECTING INDIVIDUALS FOR PURPOSEFUL PROGRAMS

There is a requirement for a re-evaluation of both the rationale and the methods of selecting graduate students. This should be done probably in relation to a group of alternative programs in the graduate school, some of them quite different from the traditionally research-oriented programs. Another is for greater demands for genuine intellectual accomplishment from those students who have been admitted. Many individuals seek graduate degrees as status symbols or have elected to enter graduate school as the least onerous (or perhaps the least arduous) of the options they face upon the receipt of a baccalaureate degree.

Still another is a requirement that faculty and administration devote large amounts of time and personal attention to continuing appraisal of the student's ability to master the educational purpose he chooses to pursue, and finally, there is a great need for improved, unemotional objective decisions which would terminate the student's involvement if at any of several successive levels of accomplishment it becomes apparent that he has attained his maximum level of development, has lost his purpose, or has been diverted by models that are not of central concern to his program.

RECOMMENDATIONS. Broadening the option in graduate programs will succeed only if better methods are developed for identifying candidates for the options.

8

RECOGNIZING SPECIAL NEEDS OF ETHNIC MINORITY STUDENTS

In the last several years substantial momentum has developed widely over the country in both public and private educational institutions, in foundations and by the efforts of government agencies in recruiting more students from ethnic minority backgrounds into higher education. As more such students reach the graduate schools, the latter will be faced with a series of special problems involving the transmission of knowledge underlying the professions to individuals who, by virtue of their backgrounds and smaller numbers, will need assistance in more fully identifying with the academic community.

RECOMMENDATION: The graduate schools should attempt, by the recognition of special problems and the development of acceptable methods of counseling, to assure the fullest possible acceptance of each minority group individuals into the academic and professional communities. Further, the graduate schools should attempt to develop some special methods to introduce minority group individuals into such areas as the natural sciences and the health and engineering professions which they have not yet begun to enter in numbers commensurate with the problems to be resolved.

9

REDIRECTING GRADUATE PROGRAMS TO MEET THE NEEDS

To the extent there is any general understanding of graduate education, it relates to traditional Master's and Ph.D. programs. The majority of these have changed over time to remain relevant. Some have become so specialized as to result in a picture of an apparent oversupply in certain areas. Needs for new sorts of programs with new emphases have gone dangerously long unrecognized.

RECOMMENDATION: The graduate schools should not attempt to control supply by admissions controls or quota systems but recognize instead that success on their part with new types of programs aimed at providing highly trained manpower to resolve urgent problems of the present and the future is the best assurance of maintaining proper balances between demand and supply. Graduate schools have obligations to assess as accurately as possible the opportunities existing for their different degree holders, but they also have responsibilities for opening up new types of opportunities.

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